



Highlights of [GAO-04-488](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Fiscal Year 2003 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Department of Defense (DOD) to assess whether general and flag officer authorizations were sufficient to meet all requirements. GAO's objectives were to determine whether DOD (1) fully disclosed the results of its study in its March 2003 report to Congress and explained the rationale for any recommendations, (2) used an established methodology to meet the objectives of its study, and (3) incorporated lessons learned from a GAO review of DOD's 1997 general and flag officer study. The 2003 act also directed DOD to review legislation affecting general and flag officer management. DOD included the results of its review in the March 2003 report, making several recommendations. GAO plans a separate review of these issues and recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD take the following actions: (1) clarify the magnitude and impact of the gap between DOD's validated requirements for general and flag officers and congressional authorizations, (2) periodically update its general and flag officer requirements, (3) enhance the precision and usefulness of the study results, and (4) incorporate the results of an ongoing study to assess civilian conversion of general and flag officer positions. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with the recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-488.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

General and Flag Officer Requirements Are Unclear Based on DOD's 2003 Report to Congress

What GAO Found

DOD's March 2003 report to Congress did not fully disclose the results of the general and flag officer study or explain its recommendation not to seek additional authorizations (people) to meet validated requirements (positions). The general and flag officer study validated requirements for general and flag officer positions that exceeded congressional authorizations for both the active and reserve components. However, the validated requirements data generated by the study were not disclosed in the March 2003 report to Congress. In its report, DOD did not address the magnitude of the gap between validated requirements of 1,630 positions and congressional authorizations of 1,311—a difference of 319. DOD's report also did not address the impact of “workarounds” used to fill the gap between requirements and authorizations, such as the practice of assigning colonels and Navy captains to general and flag officer positions. Fully disclosing the study results and discussing the implications of these findings in the March 2003 report to Congress would have provided a more complete picture of DOD's general and flag officer requirements and may have helped to explain its recommendation not to seek additional authorizations.

DOD used an established methodology to conduct a position-by-position validation of general and flag officer requirements. This methodology, known as job evaluation, has been widely used in the United States. Job evaluation, however, has numerous subjective features, including the selection of factors used for measurement. In addition, it is not designed to project emerging needs, such as those that could result from transformation efforts. Periodic updates could capture changes in requirements. Such limitations do not invalidate DOD's methodology; however, an explicit acknowledgment and assessment of these limitations would have provided more context for the study results. In addition, the study did not clearly account for dual-hatted positions (where one individual holds more than one position simultaneously) or assess how each service's authorizations were affected by the need to contribute general and flag officers to fill external (joint) positions. Addressing these issues could have enhanced the precision and usefulness of DOD's study. In addition, we noted that while Congress directed DOD to ensure the Reserve Forces Policy Board participated in development of the report's recommendations, the Board played a minimal role in producing DOD's 2003 report. The Board registered strong objections to DOD's recommendation not to seek additional authorizations now to meet validated requirements and to the limited role it played in the process.

DOD, in conducting its 2003 general and flag officer study, incorporated some of the lessons learned from a GAO review of DOD's 1997 general and flag officer study. DOD recognized the need to identify general and flag officer positions that could conceivably be converted from the military ranks to the civilian workforce, although it deferred this assessment until after the general and flag officer study was complete. DOD is currently assessing civilian conversion of general and flag officer positions.